

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00745 121533Z

51

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-25 EB-11 COME-00 AID-20 OMB-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /152 W

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R 121429Z SEP 74

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2925

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0745

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ET

SUBJECT: ERITREA - PERSPECTIVE ON GENERAL AMAN'S VISIT

REF: ASMARA 715

1. SUMMARY: TEN-DAY VISIT OF GENERAL AMAN TO ERITREA AROUSED SOME EXPECTATIONS, BUT WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE CONTINUES TO PREVAIL.

2. MMOD IN ASMARA IN WEEK AFTER GENERAL AMAN'S VISIT (AUG 27 - SEPT 6) ONE OF MINGLED EXPECTATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT. WHILE FEW ARE SURPRISED THAT AMAN DID NOT ENTER INTO DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH ELF, THERE IS NEVERTHELESS WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT OPPORTUNITY WAS ALLOWED TO PASS UNGRASPED. THINKING PERSONS, HOWEVER, REALIZE THAT SINGLE SHORT VISIT BY EVEN AS WELL-RECEIVED AFIGURE AS AMAN IS SCARCELY ADEQUATE TO RESOLVE THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD DISPUTE. WHILE SOME DECRY BOTH VISIT OF GENERAL AMAN AND APPOINTMENT OF NEW GOVERNOR GENERAL, ATO EMMANUEL ANDEMICHAEL, AS MEANINGLESS, MOST APPEAR PREPARED TO WAIT AND SEE WHAT NEW REGIME WILL BRING, BOTH IN THE WAY OF INITIATIVE WITH ELF AND RECONSTITUTED ADMINISTRATION FOR GOVERNORATE GENERAL.

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PAGE 02 ASMARA 00745 121533Z

3. ON ONE LEVEL, AMAN DID REGISTER WITH SOME IMPACT. THIS WAS HIS VISIT TO OM HAJER ON SEPTEMBER 4 TO LOOK INTO RECENT MASSACRE. HE REMOVED POLICE OFFICIALS STILL ON DUTY WHO HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS, AND INSTITUTED COMMISSION OF INQUIRY. THESE ACTIONS WELL RECEIVED, AND REGARDED AS PROMISING. PUNISHMENT OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE, AND ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVING VILLAGERS SEEN BY ERITREANS AS ONLY DEFINITE EARNST OF IEG'S GOOD INTENTIONS TO DATE. WHETHER OR NOT THESE ACTIONS CAN PAVE WAY FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH ELEMENTS OF ELF REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT IS CERTAINLY BELIEVED BY MANY TO BE THE CASE.

4. DURING COURSE OF HIS VISIT, AMAN MET WITH VIRTUALLY ALL SEGMENTS OF THE POLULATION THROUGHOUT ERITREA. AMONG MORE INTERESTING, WAS SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH LEADING BUSINESSMEN OF ASMARA ON SEPT 3. EACH RECEIVED INDIVIDUALLY BY AMAN IN PRESENCE MEMBERS AFCC OF THE NORTH, WHO UNNERVINGLY SAT UNSMILING AND WITHOUT COMMENT DURING INTERVIEWS. SUBSTANCE OF THESE WAS THAT ALL MUST WORK TOGETHER TO RESOLVE ERITREA'S PROBLEMS, AND THAT HE, AMAN, NEEDED AND EXPECTED HELP OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY. HIS OTHER MEETINGS LESS FORMAL, BUT MESSAGE IN GENERAL WAS THE SAME - NEED FOR COOPERATION TO SOLVE ERITREA'S PROBLEMS.

5. AMAN HIMSELF WAS RECIEVED EVERYWHERE WITH ALMOST DEFERENCE PREVIOUSLY ACCORDED EMPEROR. THIS APPEARS TO BE COMPOUND OF RESPECT AND FEAR. AMAN ARRIVED QUITE LATE AT RECEPTION I GAVE FOR HIM. AT HIS APPEARANCE, ASSEMBLED GUESTS PARTED, FORMING A CORRIDOR DOWN WHICH HE MADE ALMOST ROYAL PROGRESS, SMILING SLIGHTLY AND UTTERING SOFT-VOICED GREETINGS. EVENTUALLY, INITIAL SHOCK PASSED, AND CONVERSATION RESUMED, BUT HE WAS APPROACHED WARILY.

6. THE EVENING, I SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED, HAD NOT GONE UNREMARKED BY ELF, WHICH I UNDERSTAND WAS INHIBITED FROM MAKING ATTEMPT ON AMAN ONLY BY LARGE NUMBER OF ARMED TROOPS STATIONED AROUND CONSULATE GENERAL WHILE HE WAS PRESENT.

7 IN SUM, GENERAL AMAN'S VISIT TO ERITREA CAN BE CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT STEP IN REOPENING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ERITREA AND THE IEG, IF SIGNIFICANT FOLLOW-UP TAKES PLACE SOON; OTHERWISE IT WILL REALLY BE TOO LATE. IT IS TO BE HOPED THAT GOOD START THE GENERAL MADE WILL NOT BE LOST.

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PAGE 03 ASMARA 00745 121533Z

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARAMILITARY FORCES, MINISTERIAL VISITS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 SEP 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: kelleyw0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974ASMARA00745
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740255-0326
From: ASMARA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740953/aaaabsyt.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: ASMARA 715
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: kelleyw0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <28 AUG 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <06 MAR 2003 by kelleyw0>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ERITREA - PERSPECTIVE ON GENERAL AMAN'S VISIT
TAGS: PINT, ET, ELF, (AMAN MICHAEL ANDOM)
To: STATE ADDIS ABABA
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005